

REPORT
OF THE
Chicago Relief and Aid Society
TO THE
PEOPLE OF CHICAGO.

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The great fire fund committed to the care of the Chicago Relief and Aid Society is exhausted, and in view of this fact, and of its needs and duties in the future, its Directors desire to lay before the citizens of Chicago a short report of the employment of that fund since the date of its last report, and of the theory and methods of its work.

The Chicago Relief and Aid Society, like most, if not all the charities of Chicago, originated in the wants of the times, and adapted its methods to the circumstances and emergencies of the occasion. Up to 1850 there was comparatively little demand for anything of the sort. The occasional cases of destitution were amply met by the county authorities, or private charity. With the then population it was not difficult to ascertain the merits or to relieve the wants of all the unfortunate and distressed. Though the unparalleled growth of the city and country attracted multitudes of all classes hither, there were but comparatively few who were not anxious and able to be self-supporting. We have never had a large proportion of the dependent classes and scarcely any of the regular pauper element,—certainly none worth mentioning of the very lowest grade of pauperism so prominent in Eastern and European cities. Still, as the population increases, the unfortunate and dependent classes become more numerous, and the administration of relief grows

more difficult, requiring the exercise of greater care and judgment, because little can be learned of the antecedents or circumstances of many applicants beyond their own statements, or what may appear upon the surface.

The county authorities have always made liberal provision for the care of the poor in public institutions, such as the poor-house or County Farm; the County Hospital; the Hospital for Insane; and by what is commonly denominated "out-door relief,"—that is, furnishing more or less food, fuel, shoes, etc., to families at their homes.

In the great financial crisis of 1857 there was much suffering everywhere among a large class of persons who had never sought or accepted aid, and who were not embraced in any theories or plans of work for the permanently indigent. These were mechanics, clerks, seamstresses and laborers, many of them with large families or aged people depending upon them for support, whose wants could hardly be met by the county, and some of whom would have suffered in silence rather than apply to or consent to accept help from the county or city authorities. Appreciating these facts, a number of gentlemen organized in that year the Chicago Relief and Aid Society for the express purpose of relieving this class of cases with such delicate and timely assistance as would not humiliate or lessen the self-respect of the recipient, and by such aid and advice in procuring suitable employment as would enable them to again become self-supporting.

It is a chartered body with an accountability to the city of Chicago established by law. It is also subject to the visitorial power and jurisdiction of the courts. It has during the last twenty years received and disbursed materials and money amounting to over six million dollars without any defalcation or the loss of a dollar, and is able to-day to exhibit at its rooms, vouchers for every cent expended. Its plan is to extend relief to none but the temporarily disabled, and in no case to grant aid of a permanent or continuing nature. The relief of persons and families brought to want by sickness, accident, or the infirmities of age, constitutes the bulk of its work.

It has a great number of cases on record, gathered, some through the first years of its work, and many more during the last twelve years. They form a most interesting history, showing how many persons and families, with a little assistance, have been tided over a temporary difficulty, and enabled to rise above the need of help.

The following facts on this branch of the work are most instructive. In the year 1874, the total number of cases relieved was 9,719. Of this number, 6,632, or more than two-thirds, received assistance *but once*, showing conclusively that there was only one pressing time during that year in the history of these 6,632 people when they needed a helping hand. Nineteen hundred and fifty-one received help but twice, leaving but 1,142 out of the 9,719 aided that asked for assistance more than twice.

In 1875, out of 5,984 persons and families relieved, 3,257 were aided only once, and 1,399 twice, leaving 1,328 receiving assistance more than twice; many of those accepting aid but three times. In 1879, out of 3,311 persons and families relieved, 1,003 received aid but once, 365 twice, leaving 1,943 receiving assistance more than twice. In 1882, out of 3,938 cases relieved, 985 were relieved once, 550 twice, and 2,403 more than twice. Of the whole number aided, forty-seven per cent. have been relieved but once, eighteen per cent. twice, eleven per cent. three times, and but twenty-four per cent. more than three times.

These facts invite reflection. They vindicate the character of the work; they show that relief was extended to applicants disposed to aid themselves, and who, as soon as they were helped over an emergency, relieved the Society of any further demand, and they demonstrate the importance of an agency that can extend aid at a time when misfortune or accident has made it most needful.

From 1857 to 1871, the funds disbursed by this Society were contributed from time to time by our citizens. At the time of the great fire in 1871, it, because of its experience and established methods, was selected by the mayor and citizens as their agency for distributing the supplies and money sent from all portions of the civilized world for our relief. In addition to the

vast number of people (at one time over one hundred thousand) needing relief because of the fire, nearly all of the charitable institutions of the city suffered largely by it. Some of them were totally destroyed, leaving them with debts; all were more or less crippled, and their friends and supporters deprived of the means of assisting them. As much of the work must be done through the hospitals, asylums and homes for the aged and friendless, these institutions were more than ever indispensable to the general public in this great emergency, and it was thought both economical and wise to appropriate to them such amounts as would help them to resume their work and assist the Society in doing its through them, and so realize most practically and efficiently the idea of associated charities or co-operation. The results have justified this action, and the Society's relations have ever been of the most intimate and cordial character with all of the existing charities of the city. Though the fire fund as a fund is exhausted, some of its resultant benefits thus remain: the Society is still able to render extensive and valuable service to the needy through these institutions, because of the aid thus furnished them, and is at liberty to send applicants for relief to the Chicago Home for the Friendless, the Old People's Home, the Bethel Home, the Chicago Orphan Asylum, the Uhlich Orphan Asylum, the Nursery and Half-Orphan Asylum, the St. Joseph Orphan Asylum, the Women and Children's Hospital, the Alexian Brothers' Hospital, the St. Joseph Hospital, St. Luke's Hospital, the Mercy Hospital and the Hahnemann Hospital.

In addition to several Special and Annual Reports the Society made a very full report of all receipts and disbursements of money and supplies from October, 1871, to May 1st, 1874, showing all the work of the different departments in detail. It here again presents a brief synopsis of some of the leading facts contained in that report, and with it a summary of the work done since, the latter compiled from its annual reports to the Common Council of the city, thus presenting a full and final report of the Fire Fund and the amount and kind of work accomplished by it.

Stated in round numbers, nearly one million dollars was

expended under the direction of the Shelter Committee in building and furnishing something over 9,000 houses; \$250,000 was expended for sewing machines, and tools for mechanics and laborers; \$300,000 was expended for fuel for families. Over half a million was disbursed by the Medical Department and the Committee on Charitable Institutions.

From October, 1871, to May, 1874, it

Received.....	\$4,996,782 74
Disbursed	4,415,454 08

Amount unexpended, May 1st, 1874.....\$581,328 66

Over 5,000 persons have been cared for in Hospitals and other Institutions on the order and at the expense of this Society, averaging a term of four weeks to each person, which at the usual charges for such care would amount to \$125,000.

It has paid out in cash since May, 1874, \$745,072.14, making a grand total of disbursements \$5,160,526.22, besides an immense amount of all kinds of incidental service to applicants which can not be represented by figures. Nor is it possible to estimate the value of the services rendered where, examination being made, aid was refused because the applicant was unworthy.

The figures of a few of the articles issued up to the present time may be of interest:

Total No. of pieces of Men's wear to date.....	150,000
“ “ “ “ Women and children's wear to date..	280,000
“ “ pairs of blankets to date.....	82,000
“ “ comforts to date.....	12,000
“ “ pairs of shoes to date.....	102,000
“ “ R. R. tickets to invalids and parts of families to enable them to reach their friends.....	20,000
“ “ Interments.....	2,000
“ “ yards of wool flannel.....	125,000
“ “ “ “ canton “	92,000
“ “ “ “ muslin.....	180,000
“ “ “ “ dress goods.....	15,000
“ “ “ “ calico.....	210,000
Lodgings for single men.....	75,000
Meals “ “ “	35,000

Hereafter its work must be restricted to the purposes for which it was formed, as indicated in the Act of Incorporation,

namely: to afford temporary relief to the destitute. This includes timely counsel and assistance to deserving indigent persons. It will discriminate in favor of those in whom habits of temperance, industry and thrift give promise of permanent benefit from the aid furnished, and will not embrace in the sphere of its operations such persons as are proper subjects for the poor-house or for the action of the county officers. It does not attempt to deal directly with the strictly pauper class, nor with impoverished strangers sent to Chicago from other cities to be here supported by alms. We have a board of County Commissioners and a County agent who have assumed this work, and who have ample facilities and experience therefor, and with whom it is in frequent consultation. In extraordinary emergencies it becomes necessary for this Society and the County agent to co-operate.

It should be remembered that our circumstances are peculiar in another respect, namely: The tenement house system so adapted to harboring and breeding paupers is hardly known among us. Dr. DeWolf, Commissioner of Health, has furnished us with the following official report of Inspectors of tenement houses made within the last few months: "The field sheets are taken at random from Barber St., 11 houses; Bradley St., 9; Burlington St., 7; Canal St., 21; Noble St., 32; Wade St., 26; Newton Place, 11; Sloan St., 8; and give us a total of 165 houses containing 1,673 rooms, 592 families, and 2,682 persons." This averages little less than three rooms to a family, and two persons to a room, and is in remarkable contrast to the reports of other cities, which show that families of four to six persons, and often more, are crowded in one room, sometimes two or three families crowded into less quarters than those occupied by one of even the poorest families in Chicago. By far the largest proportion of even our very poor have decent rooms in buildings not occupied by more than three or four families, and many of them have little cottages by themselves. For these reasons, there are few cases of obscure wretchedness in cellars and garrets, and the necessity of employing detectives to prosecute frauds and imposition, needful perhaps in other cities, is unnecessary among us.

The charities of this city are well known to its citizens, or

can at least be easily ascertained by all who care to inform themselves; there is therefore little danger of worthy sufferers being overlooked. There is more danger in the multiplication of free lodging and soup houses, and the increase of homes for special classes, employment agencies, dispensaries and other societies, duplicating the work of those already established, and so increasing expenses and furnishing opportunities, if not inducements, for the unscrupulous to practice imposition, than there is of really needy cases being neglected, or worthy ones denied.

As long as the present condition of society remains, there will be a large proportion of honest struggling poor people who find it hard to make ends meet under the most favorable circumstances. Mechanics and laborers with large families of small children, and in many cases with aged parents dependent upon them, can hardly lay up much for a rainy day, and when unusual sickness or a specially dull season, or an extraordinary emergency overtakes them, they are compelled to seek relief; and it is still more difficult for widows with small children requiring food and clothing, but all of them too young to work, and when the mother cannot earn to exceed two or three dollars a week at washing or scrubbing, and less for sewing at the prices usually paid. There is another and larger class than either of these, and far more pitiable, where the man spends all he earns for drink, doing little or nothing for the support of his family, and increasing the burden of his suffering wife and children by his abuse. The most embarrassing question that this Society has to meet in its work is how and how much it can help such a family without encouraging the man in his viciousness, and how much the family should be left to suffer on his account.

Great prudence should be exercised in the administration of charitable work, lest through its agency barriers be erected against the operation of wholesome and natural laws, and people be sheltered from the punishment which the welfare of the community requires shall be visited upon idleness and crime. Yet it is none the less the fact that any theory for the suppression of pauperism and the discouragement of relief is radically defective that does not recognize the truth that thousands of innocent

helpless women and children, in a city of the size of Chicago, by no fault of their own, are oftentimes on the very verge of starvation, and never decently clothed. There is no danger of pauperizing such with timely and judicious help, and the chances of their becoming paupers and possibly criminals, if they are not treated with some measure of intelligent sympathy and material aid, cannot be questioned.

But adventurers, tramps and vagrants infest every large city, who are not proper subjects for relief by this Society and ought not to be embraced in any plans for the improvement of the poor, and in this connection we wish to emphasize the fact that indiscriminate giving to beggars in the street is always a crime against society, and an injury to the individual. The only way to prevent it is to give nothing to any person whom you do not know to be needy and worthy, and not then if aid is being received from other sources. With all the well-known agencies and institutions of every kind in this city for the care of the poor and sick: the churches, most of which look after their own poor, the fraternities and societies of different trades and nationalities pledged to help their own members, the visiting clergy, physicians, nurses and neighbors, there is little danger of any worthy persons suffering or failing to receive either needful assistance, or direction to the proper channel of relief. It is to be presumed that every society engaged in this work will promptly investigate, through experienced agents, all cases referred to it, by visitation and by reference to employers and others capable of giving information. With proper scrutiny, there is little danger of imposition.

The prevention of pauperism is unquestionably one of the great social problems of our time, but that other question, inseparably connected with it, is of equal importance, namely, how to afford timely and proper relief to the worthy suffering poor. All who care for the best interests of society, will take equal interest in both, but as every one cannot take the time to personally investigate each case that may come to his notice, the Society respectfully requests that all applicants be sent to it, to the end that it, with its records, and its accumulated skill and

experience, may step in between the giver and the applicant, and still leave the satisfaction that a benevolent deed will be done and that it will be done with judgment and without waste.

In all cases where so desired, it will report the result of its investigation. Its rooms and books are open to the public, and it invites all interested to inspect its methods and work.

One word more as to the method of the work. This is conducted through a system of friendly intercourse with all other charities in Chicago, and by a personal visitation, that two things may be ascertained: first, the actual condition of the applicant: second, what assistance, if any, such applicant is receiving from other sources. In its efforts to obtain reliable information, the Society has the advantage of its relations, before stated, with the various charities named, and of its own reports, showing the history, situation and surroundings of a large proportion of the poor of this city, not only those who have been aided but also many thousands of those to whom aid has been refused, so systematized that any individual case can be referred to at once. It is confident that this plan of work, which has been perfected by many years of experience, prevents duplication of relief so far as it is possible, and gives at the same time a valuable record of the condition of our needy classes.

The Board of Directors whose names are appended believe that this Society with its records, experience and established relations with other charities, is a valuable agency to the city of Chicago, and ask you to make such contributions towards its work for the winter of 1883 and 1884 as it seems to you its importance deserves.

C. G. HAMMOND,
T. W. HARVEY,
C. H. CASE,
R. T. CRANE,
J. HARLEY BRADLEY,
C. H. S. MIXER,
J. MASON LOOMIS,
JULIUS ROSENTHAL,
A. A. SPRAGUE,
O. W. POTTER,
A. C. BARTLETT,

E. B. McCAGG,
HENRY W. KING,
ABIJAH KEITH,
WIRT DEXTER,
HENRY FIELD,
H. A. JOHNSON, M.D.
W. C. LARNED,
WM. H. BRADLEY,
C. F. GATES,
C. L. HUTCHINSON.

HON. CARTER HARRISON, Mayor, ex-officio.

CHICAGO, January 1, 1884.



